

Radical Middle Way Transcripts

Habib Ali al-Jifri on 'Ocean of Compassion'

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All Praise be to God, The Compassionate the Merciful, Whose bounties to us are before time. Whose bounties upon us are many, varied and wide. And blessings and peace be upon the great mercy of God, Muhammad (saw), and upon his brothers, and fathers from amongst the Messengers of God. Adam, Abraham Moses, Jesus and all of the Prophets between them. And upon all of their families, and all of their Companions and Disciples and all of those who follow them until the Day of Judgment.

Days have passed for this person full of sin, full of short comings, full of needs, in which I feel that something has been poured into my heart as I have been going around hearing and reading. And I believe that this thing that was brought to me is attached to meanings that are to do with the mercy of God. Our trip here began with a three day intensive course with young people who are interested in walking the spiritual path where we study the book about the spiritual path and the methods of wayfaring. There were lectures, discussions, meetings, with Muslims and non-Muslims alike. And as my brother Fuad mentioned this is the last public meeting on this trip.

I notice that some of the young people, their faces have not been absent in any of the meetings, they've been there for every meeting since they came. And there are some who come to one place, and someone else will come to another. And when I think about it, what do all the people that come to the gatherings have in common? No one can claim that it has anything to do with them, neither the speaker nor anyone else. It's just that for some of us Godly nobles, God uses to gather His servants around Him. The last thing I wanted to mention on this trip is that the thing we can speak about to everyone around us. I wanted to address both the things we like and the things we dislike; the things that make us happy and the things that sadden us; the thing which we can address our friends and those who perceive themselves our enemies. Nay, before all of those different people, the thing by which we can address our own self is an attribute by which God used to describe Himself. And by which He described His Messengers. And God commanded for it to become a connecting factor between them. That attribute is the attribute of mercy.

The Prophet of God (saw) said that God has a hundred mercies, One of which He displayed to the Earth. And by which a mother has kindness and tenderness to her child. And by which an animal retracts its claws so that it does not harm its newly born and ninety nine of those Mercies of God, He has held with Him and hidden from us until the Day of Judgment. When the day of Judgment comes He combines that one mercy which he made descend on the earth with the other ninety nine that are with

him and He displays them to His servants, and He greets His servants with those (the mercies).

What came to me is that this mercy that God has cast amongst the servants and the earth, and which He then gathers up to the other ninety nine, is that, that one Mercy will become like an introduction to the other ninety nine because it's already made itself known to us on this earth. And in proportion to one's share of that Mercy that came to the Earth one will also have a connection to the other Mercies that he will see on the Day of Judgment. And because God knows our innate nature and that we need something that we can relate to, God gave us a model of Mercy and Guidance whose light God filled with Mercy. He sent us our Master Muhammad (saw) and when God sent him, He said to him in His revealed scripture regarding His Message, *'And We sent you as nothing but a Mercy.'* God also sent him with the affirmation of Divine Oneness and the negation of partners to God. He sent him with the affirmation of Justice and the negation of injustice. He sent him with benevolence and the negation of doing bad to others. He sent him with the message of enjoining good and forbidding wrong. But God rendered the thing that encompasses the entire message is mercy.

Then God told us, follow his message, follow his way of life, follow his example, and affirm the divine Oneness and affirm the Prophetic status of the Prophet Muhammad (saw), that we must remove the darkness of our own selfishness. That's why God never said in the Qur'ān *'Prophet We sent you as nothing but a mercy to the Muslims, but to all the worlds.'* The Prophet came as a mercy. This mercy had an inner reality and an outward expression. Part of that mercy was to the women, and in his time, women were buried alive. Or when the man of the family dies, the women will be inherited like trappings and belongings. And he (saw) came to remove that from the women, and said to the men, *'a woman is your other half'*. So he said women are the same as you, they are your other half. And he (saw) said that the best of you are the best to his family, and I am the best to my family. So he made an example through his own actions. He was a living example. He came as a mercy to the little child. He created a principle way before the introduction of children's rights, which were that children were given preference over anybody else. So the Prophet showed us by example when he ascended the pulpit on a Friday, and the sermon of the Friday prayer has its sanctity and is a time where one should not fiddle around with anything on them because it is like the one who has distracted himself from the prayer, and the one who does too much of that has no prayer. But the Prophet (saw) was giving his sermon on a Friday from the pulpit and his grandson, *sayeduna Hassan* - a little toddler at the time - was walking into the mosque, and kept on falling down and getting up. So the Prophet had stopped the sermon from the pulpit, descended to pick up his grandson and went back up to the pulpit.

And one time he was leading the Muslims in prayer, and whilst he was in prostration, his other grandson Husseyn climbed on his back as if he was a mount, and mounted him. And the Prophet stayed in his prostration until his grandson had gotten off under his own accord. And when this obligatory prayer was finished, the Companions said to him, *'you spent so long in prostration that we thought you had passed away'*. And he said *'no, I was just waiting for my grandson to get off himself.'*

Some of the scholars looking at that example have said that his grandson Husseyn wouldn't have done that in front of all of those men when he was a toddler, because children usually stop around strangers, they wouldn't do certain things they do at home. They said he only did that in front of stranger because he was used to doing that in the privacy of their own home.

There are some non-Muslims that will think, what is the big deal about this? It is common sense that anybody would be kind to a child. But what needs to be understood is the place of prayer in a Muslim's life, the sanctity of prayer in a Muslim's life. The meaning of the prayer in a Muslim's life is that it is a meeting between the servant and his Creator. For the Prophet and his Companions it was a deep state of immersion, such that they left this world and everything in it. It's a point where the servant meets his Creator. But what the Prophet was teaching us, was that within that state of communal prayer, within that state of spiritual elevation, in that state of immersion whilst in the presence of God, in a state where God draws near to the servant, he was showing God he has mercy to God's creatures, through his treatment of his grandson during prayer.

The depth and total state of immersion during prayer was such that when one of the Companions of the Prophet had an injury which necessitates his leg to be amputated and he didn't want the doctors to give him any anesthetic so he said to them, *'wait for me, and when you see me lost in my prayer, cut my leg off'* and they cut his leg off and he didn't feel the pain of his leg being removed because of his state of immersion in the prayer.

The Prophet of God blessings and peace on him, even in his state of immersion in prayer, when he heard a child crying, and he knew his mother was in the prayer and she couldn't see to that child, he would hasten the prayer for the sake of that child. He was teaching us that mercy was the very essence of prayer. And he even showed us mercy to the animals and in his biography there are stories of how animals would come to him and complain to him, and he would stand up for their rights against the owners who were mistreating the animals.

He also taught us mercy to inanimate things (saw). When he (saw) told us that the mountain of *Uhud* love us and we love it. And one could say that he loves this mountain because it is a mountain of heaven, or one could say that it is a mountain which he has memories with, because it is near a place where he lived, so it reminds him of this, so he had a fondness. However he didn't just say we love this mountain, he said the mountain loves us. To tell us that even inanimate things have senses and we should be sensitive to even the inanimate things around us.

And when we see that because of humanity's state of dislocation and disconnection and human greed that the Earth is being corrupted and being damaged and destroyed we live a state of knowing this because of his hearts connection to that very Earth. And because he doesn't see the Earth as something that God subjugated to him, he sees the Earth as something that was entrusted to him by God- for him to be a representative of God upon this Earth. So he is a trustee to God, and the earth is not subjugated to him.

God in the Qur'ān spoke about the 'bondsmen of the All Merciful' *'ibaad Al-rahmān'* of all the names He chose to call them - the bondsmen of the All Merciful. But He

starts describing this human being who is connected to the divine presence and attached to His name The Merciful, the first of the attributes. And the slaves of the All Merciful when they walk the Earth with gentleness, and when they are addressed by the ignorant ones, they respond with 'peace'.

When we look upon the injustices in the world we see around us, look at the state of our families, look at the state of our societies look at the state of the Earth and these injustices that go upon it. That's what we say with our lips. But in our beings, and actions but we should be people who want to act upon the mercy we want to see in creation. Because of the mercy we see in creation, we can be a vessel for the mercy of heaven.

There is a hadith that is transmitted in every generation all the way back to the Prophet, and it is an unbroken chain of hadith, and the scholars of transmission state it is the first hadith cited and the Messenger of God said (saw) *'the merciful are shown mercy by the merciful'*. Show mercy to those on Earth, and you will be shown mercy from the One in Heaven.

And the Prophet of God spoke about a woman who would pray and give charity, yet had a cat that she imprisoned and starved to death so she neither fed this cat, nor allowed the cat to fend for itself and feed itself. The women would end up in hell, meaning her prayer and charity was of no avail to her because of the suffering that she put that cat through. Because in the moment that she decided to imprison the cat and let it starve to death, mercy had left her heart.

He (saw) spoke about another women who acted very wrongly and sinned a lot but she would be saved and enter the Garden because at one point in her life she was about to pull water out of a well and she saw this dog that was parched of thirst and who's tongue was dry and she filled her shoe with water and gave it to the dog. And he, the Prophet (saw), said that act of kindness to the dog was what was going to take her into the garden.

Imām Al-Ghazzālī was seen in a dream when he passed away, and a dream vision does not play a part in the formation of law, a dream vision only guides the heart of the person who sees it. That's why we are going to speak about this after we have spoken about the Prophetic traditions. He was seen in a dream after he passed away. And the person who saw him in a dream said to him in the dream, *'what did God do to you?'* And he said *'God forgave me.'* And he allowed me to enter the Garden. And the man said to him, *'did you enter the garden because of the books you wrote, the people you educated, the sciences you poured out (discovered), the good that you showed humanity?'* He said *'no, the reason I was allowed into the Garden is because one night, when I was up till late writing, this fly came and settled on the feathers of my quill. And I saw that this fly may have been thirsty, because on the nib of the quill there is ink which has moisture, so he said he held his hand perfectly still so the fly can finish drinking'*. He was shown mercy because he had shown mercy to that fly. And he said in God's presence, God asked him *'What did you do?'* And he said that he was overcome by standing in the Divine Presence. And God (swt) said to him, *'Oh Muhammad Al-Ghazzālī. Do you remember when that fly settled on your quill whilst you were writing? I will give you My Mercy and allow you to enter the Garden and accept all of your deeds because of that moment of mercy you had towards that fly'*

The Prophet came with the teachings of this kind of Mercy. He came to teach us how to live it with everything that surrounds us. One of the wondrous things is that the Prophet used to enjoin on the soldiers that were about to fight against the transgressors, to have mercy on the people.

In today's military training, usually the trainers are taught to think that the best way to help the army is to raise morale, to tell them (the soldiers) to be harsh, tell them to go out and win the day (battle/war) tell them to have victory, tell them they are doing it for victory and tell them for whatever. But his (saw) advice for the soldiers about to go out and fight was to tell them to go in the name of God. And the name of God is tied to the names, The Merciful, The Compassionate in every verse of the Qur'ān. The Prophet commanded, *'Do not cut the trees, do not burn any date trees, do not kill any women, do not kill any children, do not kill any of the elderly, do not kill anyone who is feeling from the battle, do not kill any of the prisoners of war, do not kill those who are injured. And the Prophet said, 'you will pass on your way monasteries where there will be monks and priests worshiping, leave them in their worship. And don't be saddened and don't denigrate people and you will be victorious if you fear God'*

Look at all the advice he is giving them: don't cut don't, don't burn, don't kill etc. this is what he is telling soldiers who are about to fight. In the end, he told them not to be cowards and not to be sad. All these words the Prophet wasn't just saying for no reason, he was teaching us that if we have this mercy in our hearts, then we have nothing to fear or be sorry about. We saw that lived and exemplified in the leaders who really carried the banner of 'struggling for the sake of God', not those leaders who do it for criminal motivations, to kill people.

We learned that Salāh Al-dīn Al-Ayubī when he was told that Richard the Lion heart, who was fighting at the time in the Crusades was ill, he sent Richard the Lion heart his own personal physician to look after him. And our early scholars didn't used to write about these wars as the 'crusades', instead they used to call them the wars with the Franks, because they didn't believe that such a thing could be don't by the Christians. But in reality the religion had been usurped, surrendered.

In one of the battles Salāh Al-dīn Al-Ayubī's soldiers captured 5000 of the Franks. And the winter was coming. Now look at this. Winter is coming. And they have captured 5000 prisoners of war- what a great opportunity to start squeezing the enemy. Bu Salāh Al-dīn Al-Ayubī turned to his generals and asked them if they had enough winter clothes and blankets to cover them (the Prisoners of war) in the winter? And the generals replied, *'no, we do not have enough for them'* so Salāh Al-dīn Al-Ayubī told them to let the prisoners go free. And then the generals said *'but they will return with their swords to fight us again.'* And Salāh Al-dīn Al-Ayubī replied that *'if they come back with their swords we kill them with our swords, and to kill them with our swords is better for us than going into God's presence on the Day of Judgment, and (to be judged on why) we killed them because we allowed them to freeze to death'*

Do you know where that teaching came from? From a word the Prophet said. The Prophet (saw) after the battle of Badr, the prisoners of war were brought to him, and these were the people who transgressed and aggressed against him and the

Companions, and he saw them in chains, and the Prophet said to them (his Companions) *'Be benevolent to your prisoners of war.'*

Do you know what happened after he said that word? He said that some of the Companions had nothing more than two pieces of bread. One made of good quality wheat and the other made of low quality wheat. So they took the good piece of bread and gave it to the prisoner of war and the bad quality bread they had for themselves and their wives. So these are the examples of his mercy (saw) they are all gathered up in one reality of mercy. And it is by that I can see a future for you in Britain. And you have a great future in Britain.

Western Civilization has reached a very high level, of technology, of Management strategy, of academic research, of discovery, of scientific discovery, but parallel to that is the individual in the west, just as they have reached a high level in the aforementioned fields, have also reached a very high level of thirst for real spiritual meaning. They have a very high receptivity to any high and lofty principles they see embodied in front of them, not in the words of Ali al Jifri, but they need to see it embodied in front of them (meaning, not through the words of a figure such as Habib Ali, but rather through a living example).

The reality that will form that great future for you is connected to the reality of Muhammad (saw) and it is the reality of Mercy. Do you know what the reality of Mercy dealing with creation is? It is to take people by the hand and guide them through their own conviction, to the point that they turn towards the truth, from acting badly to being benevolent people, and to make people gain victory over their own egotistical drives. That they defeat the drives of their lower desires and caprices and lower desires? You need to show them the way to defeat their egos. But can anyone truly show that if they have not done it for themselves? How do we defeat ourselves? How do we use this eye to look at things in a way which is pleasing to God? God has not permitted you to look down and denigrate any other person. How do you do the same for your hand, your ear, your stomach (how do you make their actions pleasing to Allah)? How does your tongue become like that? The answer is your heart. It's how your heart looks at creation that changes your outlook and approach.

What is the difference between the believer who is connected to the Muhammadan reality and between the one who isn't. When all we think about from the moment we wake till the moment we sleep is how to take what we want, when does the time come for us to think about what we can give others? And I think it is out of Mercy that I stop talking now.

Your intentions when you leave this gathering, God will look at them. Let's bring back to life the meaning of Mercy. And we should invoke God's Mercy by being merciful to His servants. And you have before you a big inner struggle with your sown selves, with your children, with your spouses, with your neighbours and with your friends to make this a reality. Ask God to give me and you total sincerity to do so.

[Closing Du'ā']

About Habib Ali al-Jifri

Habib 'Ali Zain Al Abideen Al Jifri was born into a family of noble lineage extending in an unbroken chain to Imam Husayn (ra), the grandson of the Prophet (saw). Habib 'Ali is from the majestic city of Tarim, South Yemen. Nestled in the ancient valley of Hadramawt, Tarim has been a center of learning and spirituality for centuries. Habib 'Ali received a classical Islamic education from the illustrious scholars of Hadramawt, embodying a methodology which crystallizes the middle way of Islam, Islamic Jurisprudence, a respect for the differences between jurists and a spiritual education drawn from the Qur'an and the Sunnah. Habib 'Ali is Founder of the 'Taba Foundation for Islamic Studies and Research' based in the United Arab Emirates. He is also a lecturer at Dar Al Mustafa, Tarim, an educational institute established for the study of traditional Islamic sciences. Habib 'Ali is continually invited to lecture in many countries across the globe and appears regularly on a variety network television and radio programs.

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